

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest – 2005

Second Prize: Maya Riser-Kositsky, Lake Washington Girls Middle School

The Legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. is a hero and role model of many people. He was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, who believed in non-violence, to try to achieve change by peaceful means, not bloodshed.

Martin Luther King Jr. was born in 1929, at a time when restaurants, buses, trains, drinking fountains, schools and lunch counters in the South were segregated. He went to Morehouse College and became a Baptist minister. Martin Luther King Jr. became involved in the civil rights movement when Rosa Parks was jailed for not giving up her seat on a bus; King and E.D. Nixon, president of the NAACP, started the Montgomery bus boycott. King worked to desegregate the buses and lunch counters. He worked for equal rights for blacks and wrote many inspirational speeches. Martin Luther King was assassinated on April 4, 1968. When people heard the news there were riots in over 100 cities.

Martin Luther King Jr. believed in non-violence. He supported marches and boycotts, instead of violent demonstrations. Many other civil rights leaders did not share his opinions; they said that black people had been oppressed for too long and it was time to fight back and overthrow white power. When riots and demonstrations were violent however, more black people were hurt and killed than white people or the police. King thought that non-violence showed officials that blacks were willing to cooperate. He believed that white supremacy and black supremacy were both racism and would not solve the problem of segregations.

In his most famous speech King said, "I have a dream that one day this great nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of it's creed. 'We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal.'" King's fight is an ongoing one and many people all over the country fight it in their every day lives; they fight to get the same amount of funding for schools in poor parts of cities as rich parts, they fight for equal marriage rights and they fight for better working conditions.

King's dream has not been fulfilled when schools in black neighborhoods do not have the supplies or funding to give the children the gift of literacy. When schools in white neighborhoods score so much higher than the schools in black neighborhoods, then King's dream is not fulfilled. When those children in those black schools graduate and the only job they can get is one that doesn't pay enough to cover their rent, some may turn to criminal activities to complete their income. Their lives are ruined because their government did not fully fund their schools. King's dream is not fulfilled when the jails are full of people who committed crimes because that is the only way they can get enough money to survive.

King's dream is being fulfilled by people fighting for the right of marriage. They march and rally peaceably. They lobby and go to court for the right to marry whoever they want.

King's dream is not fulfilled when overseas child labor is being used to make products which are sold in America by people making barely over minimum wage, who are not getting benefits or getting paid for their overtime. These people are paid so little while the owners of the companies are making so much. When these workers try to unionize or ask for a raise they are fired and replaced by an endless line of people desperate enough to work for anything.

When parents have to have three jobs just to buy clothes for their children, King's dream is not fulfilled. When there is nothing a teacher can do for a child with a learning disability except watch them struggle, King's dream is not fulfilled. When some schools only have nurses for one day a week and librarians for only half a day while others have art, music and P.E. teachers, King's dream is not fulfilled.

King was against war and when most of the new recruits in the army are from poor neighborhoods and join only because they feel they have no other choice with their lives, his legacy is not being fulfilled. When army recruiters are so desperate for recruits that they break the law and lie to kids to get them into the army, his dream has not come true. When communities are so poor that day care is provided by the army so the recruiters have an early chance to brain-wash the children, King would be sad. When citizens are detained in secret prisons without being charged with anything and without the chance to talk to a lawyer, King's dream is not fulfilled.

Martin Luther King's legacy is hope; the hope that you can change the world into a better place if you try. Martin Luther King and the many people inspired by him are changing this country into a place where all people are truly created equal.

WORKS CITED

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"I Have A Dream" by Martin Luther King" National Civil Rights Museum.

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